Claude DEBUSSY
CENTENARY EDITION 2018

IMAGES BOOK II

- CLOCHES À TRAVERS LES FEUILLES
- ET LA LUNE DESCEND SUR LE TEMPLE QUI FUT
- POISSONS D'OR

Piano Practical Editions
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Claude DEBUSSY 1862 - 1918

Images book II

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Debussy dedicated this second volume of *Images* to three of his friends: the artist Alexandre Charpentier, the musicologist Louis Laloy, and the pianist Ricardo Viñes. As early as 1903, the composer had planned to send his publisher "twelve pieces for the piano" including the three titles produced here, and they were finally published by Durand in 1908, with a first public performance by Viñes the following year.

Laloy stated that the score marked « a true revolution in the art of piano writing ». In the early 1900s, Debussy's already exquisite and subtle techniques, took on new depths of tone colour and sophistication.

While it is possible to try and find meaning and clues to interpretation in the evocative titles, the music is rather a projection, an illusion of mood and character, each piece finding its own *raison d'être* through the skill of the composer.

As Baudelaire had recently stated: « scents, colours and sounds reflect one another. » Debussy once wrote: « The aim of French music is, before all, to please. The musical genius of France may be described as a fantasy of the senses ».

The composer himself valued the *Images* highly, telling his publisher, Jacques Durand, "*I think I may say without undue pride that I believe these pieces will live and will take their place in the piano literature ... either to the left of Schumann, or to the right of Chopin.*"

From a letter to Durand : "*I believe more and more that music in its essence is not a thing that can be poured into a rigorous and traditional mould. It is made of colours and rhythmical beats.*"

"Pedalling cannot be written down", Debussy explained — *"It varies from one instrument to another, from one room, or one hall, to another"*. Combined with the sustaining pedal, it is possible, even desirable, to use the sostenuto* pedal effectively, although this is entirely editorial.

In addition to some suggested fingering, the appendices contain comments, afterthoughts and a vocabulary. Redistribution between the hands comes under close scrutiny to make certain passages easier or more persuasive. Debussy rarely uses the pedal sign preferring extended ties or long bass notes, impossible to hold otherwise; sometimes even *laisser vibrer...*

* The sostenuto pedal was first shown in Paris at the Industrial Exposition of 1844. The idea was not immediately taken up by piano builders, but in 1874, is was perfected and patented by Steinway, soon to be fitted on all their grands and better uprights. One obvious commercial reason for not including the sostenuto pedal in musical scores must have been the thought of excluding buyers whose pianos didn't have it. Debussy and Ravel certainly played one such Steinway grand *chez* Madame de Saint Marceaux and also one bought by Winnaretta de Polignac in 1906. One could say that it took over 100 years for it to become commonplace.

iano Practical Editions

Musical Health Warning : please be aware that these editions are definitely not urtext and should be consulted together with a traditional version. They have been devised purely to help solve musical and technical problems at the piano.

Please send comments and error reports to
Ray Alston : contact@pianopracticaleditions.com

I *Cloches à travers les feuilles*

(Bells through the leaves)

à Alexandre Charpentier

At first sight you might mistake the opening bars for a study in counterpoint, and although it is indeed a study in polyphony, once the pedals are in use (and this will be the case for the entire work) it becomes transformed into another

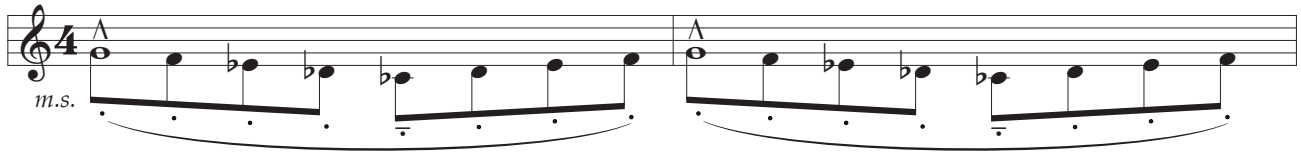
Debussy masterpiece, the whole tone scale evoking church steeple bells in eastern France — the village of Rahon was where Debussy's first biographer and close friend Louis Laloy lived, also the dedicatee of the second piece — *Et la Lune…*

Bells often occur in music by impressionists: Cloches du Soir, *La Vallée des Cloches, Le Gibet, La Cathédrale Engloutie, Cloches d'angoisses et larmes d'adieu, the Bells of Moscow, etc.* and this exquisite work becomes a landscape in miniature. The composer explores the idea of bells sounding in the distance and heard variously through leaves which quiver with a life of their own — leaves which break sunlight over figures in the shade.

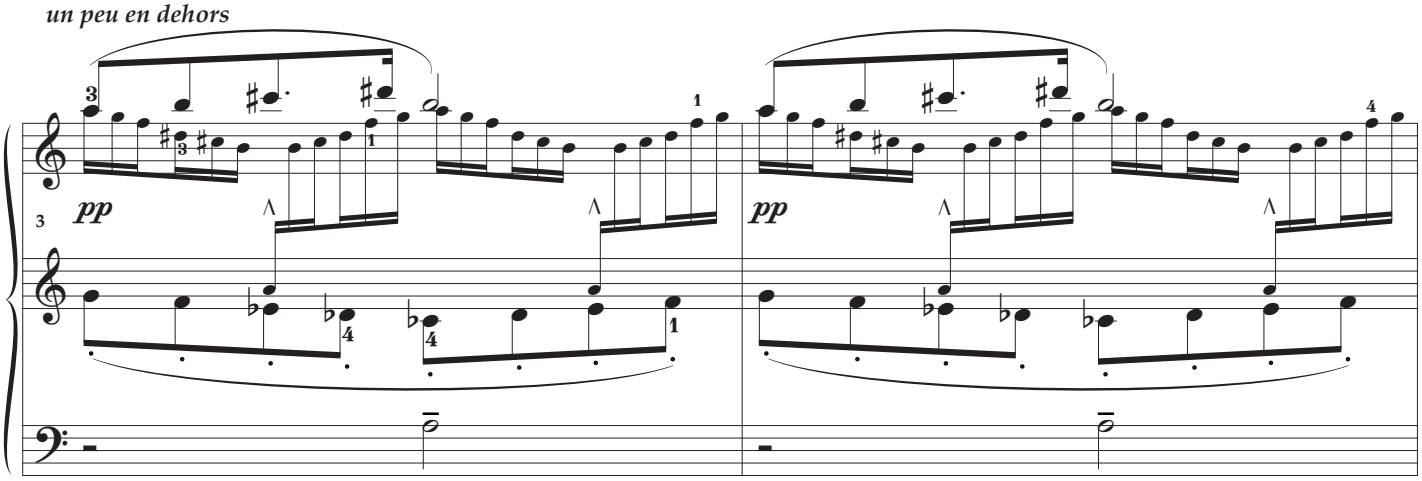
Debussy gives an alternative title « *Cloches dans le feuillage » (mélancolie diffuse)*, the opening theme presenting the sound of melancholic tolling bells, calling and responding at different registers mostly confined within a very soft dynamic.

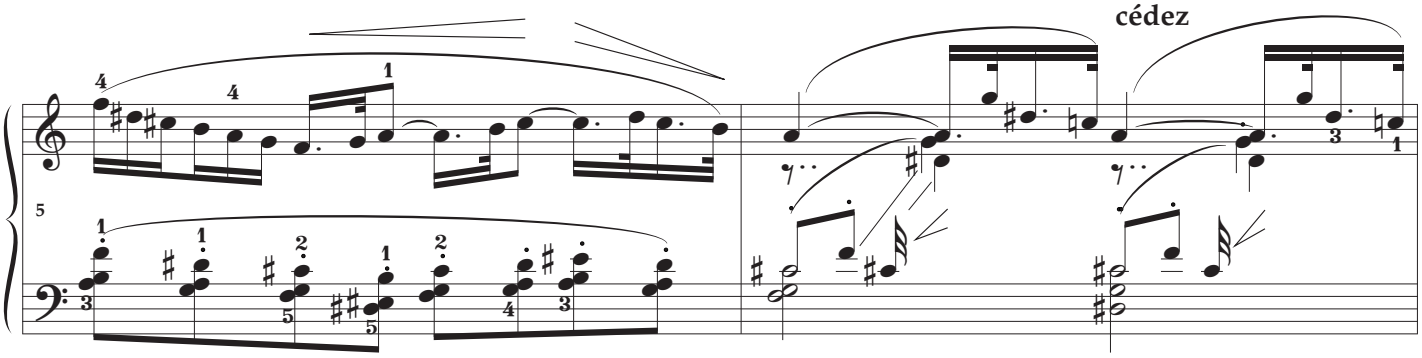
Cloches à travers les feuilles

Lent [♪= 92]
doucement sonore

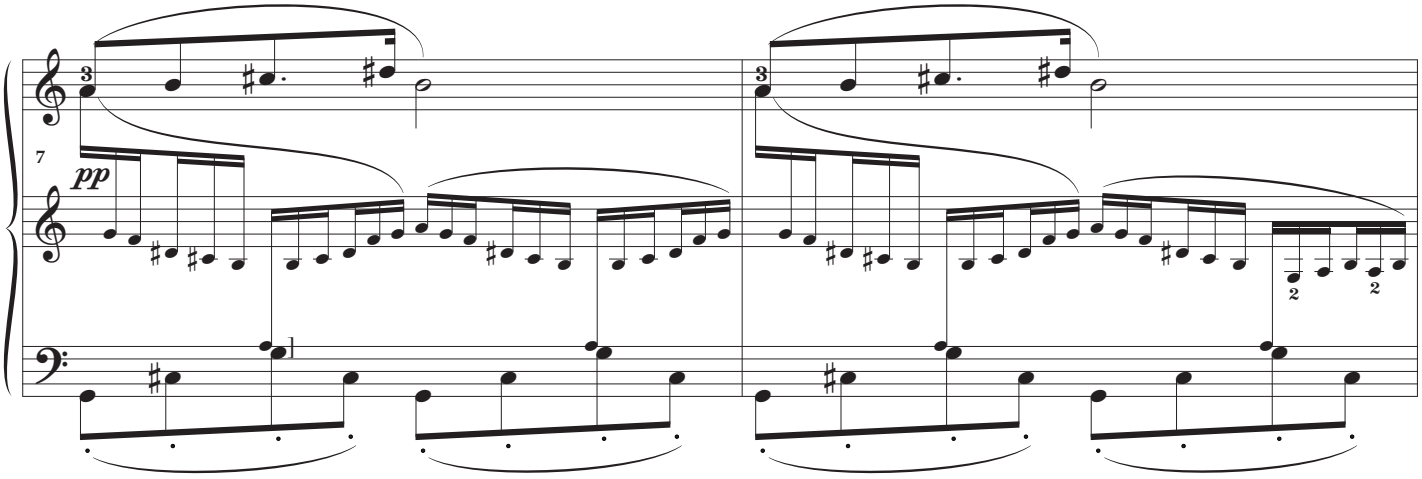


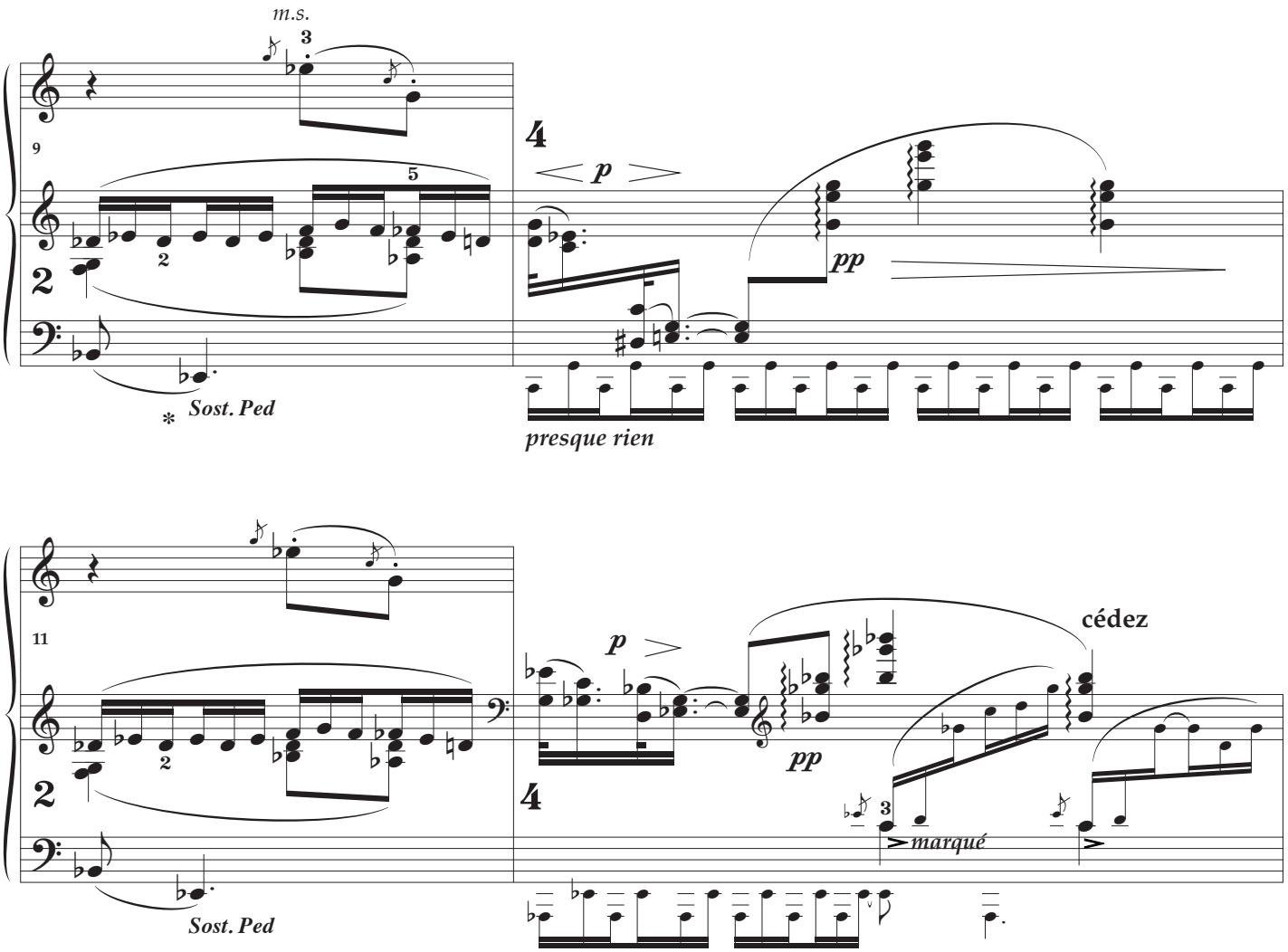
un peu en dehors



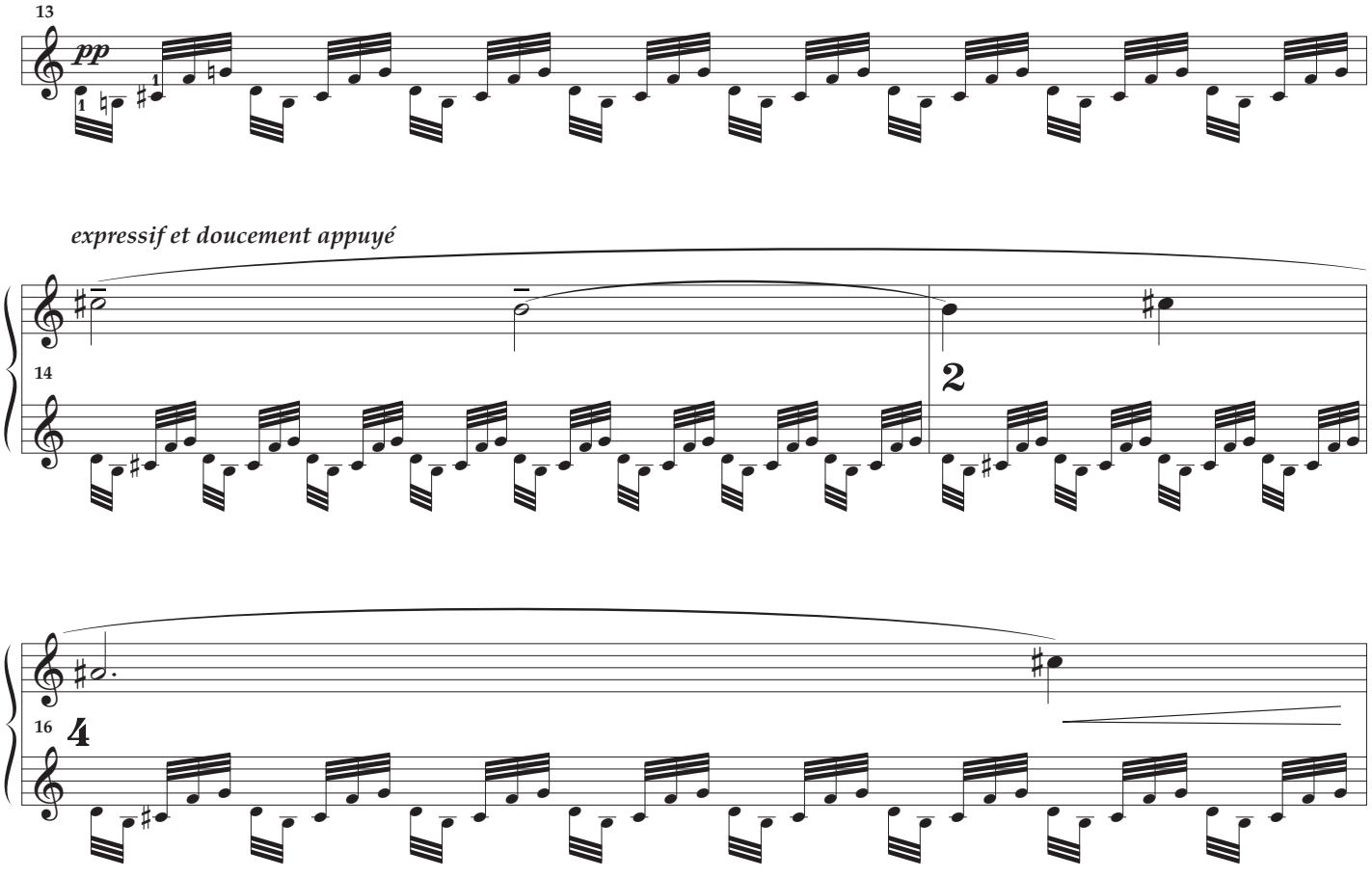


au mouvement

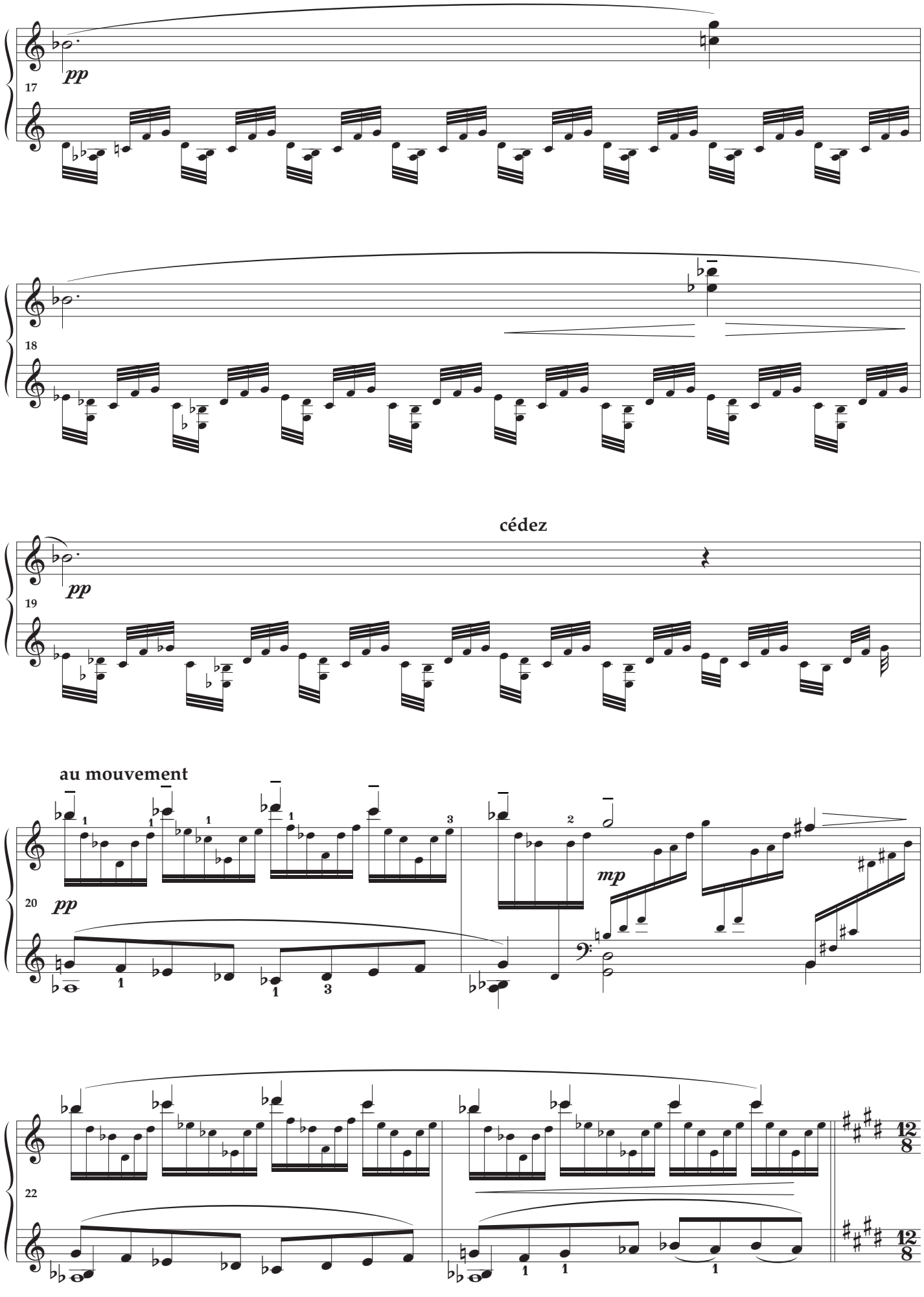


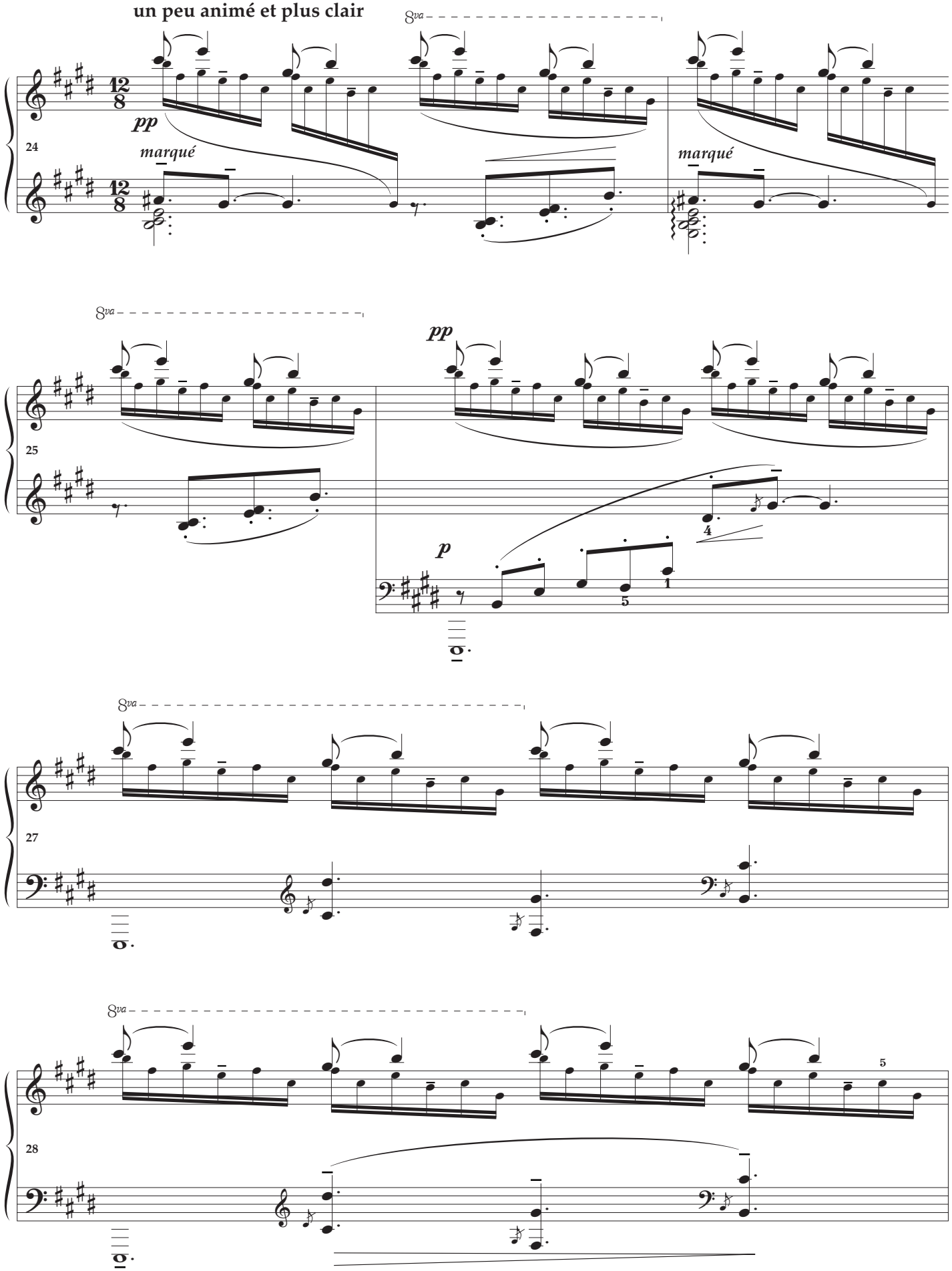


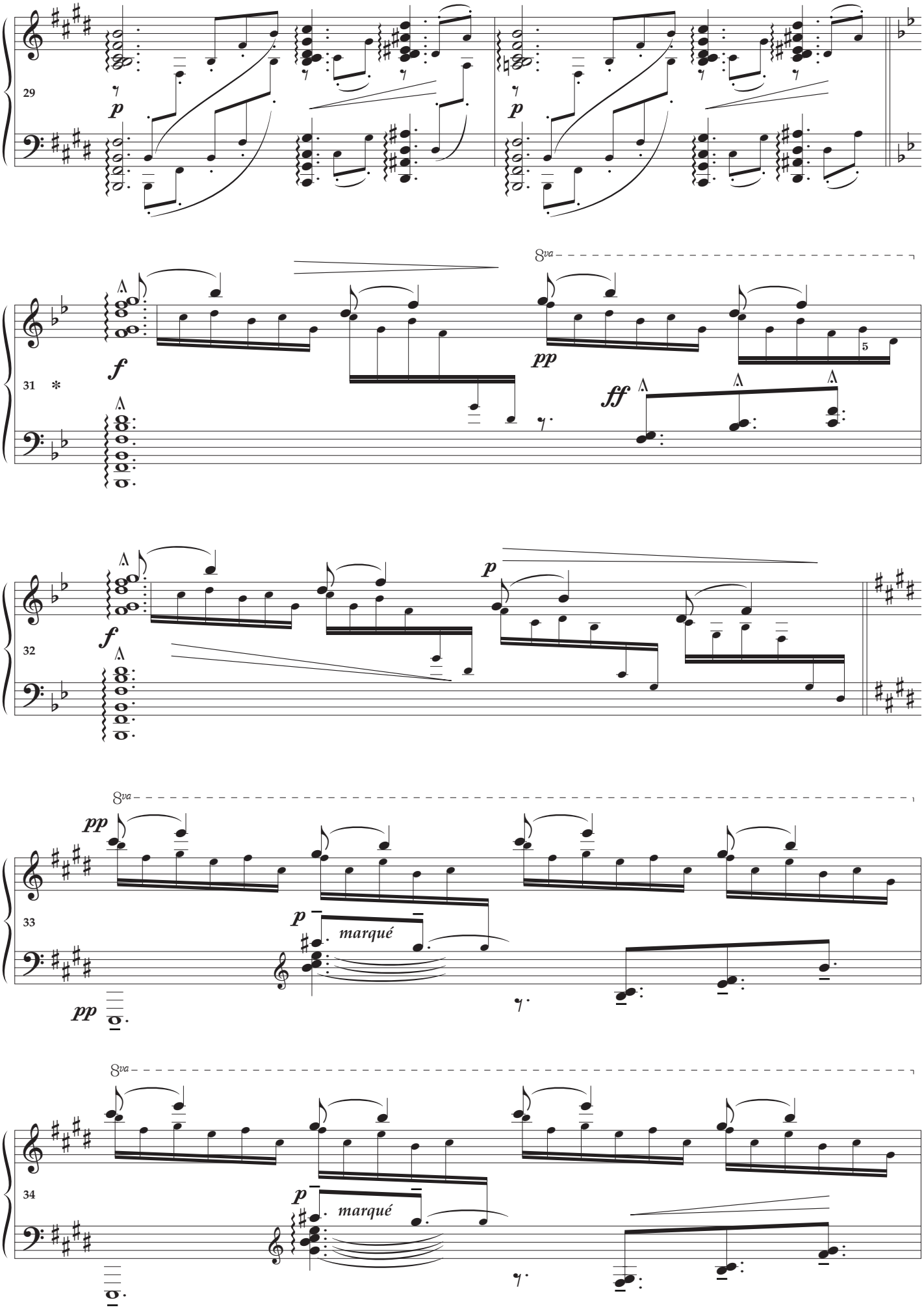
au mouvement *très égal — comme une buée irisée*

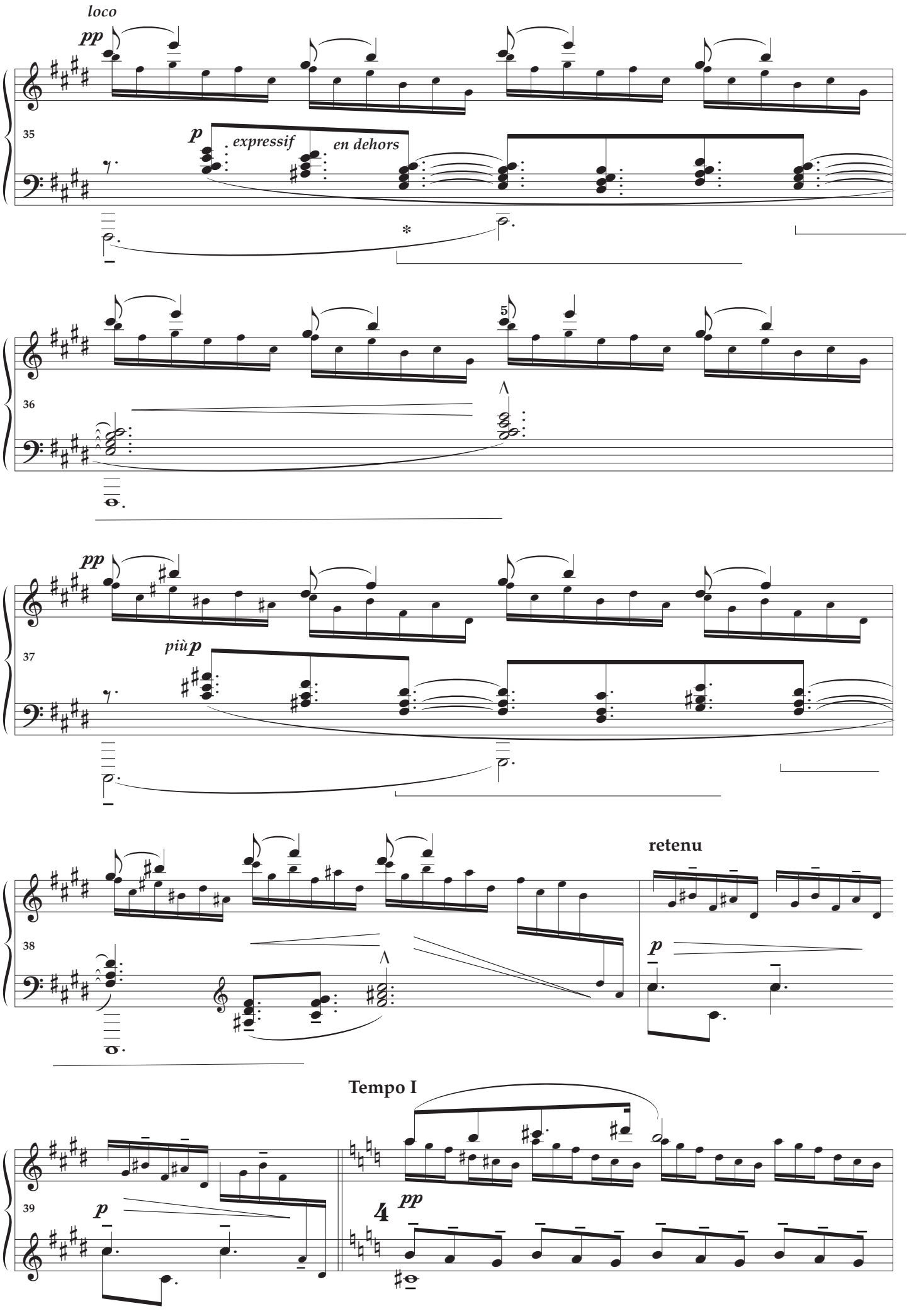


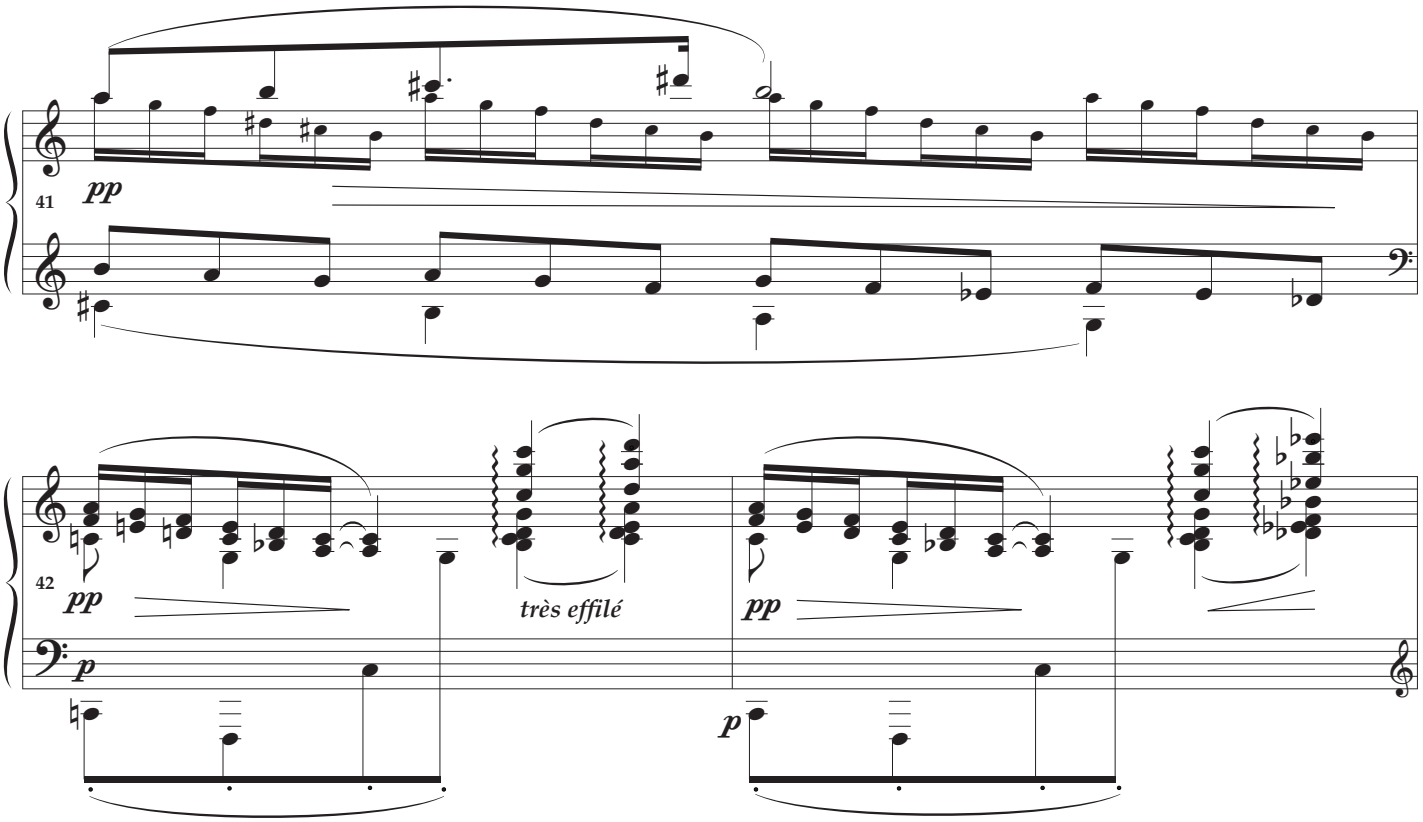
expressif et doucement appuyé


17
pp
18
cédez
19
pp
au mouvement
20
pp
mp
22
12/8
12/8

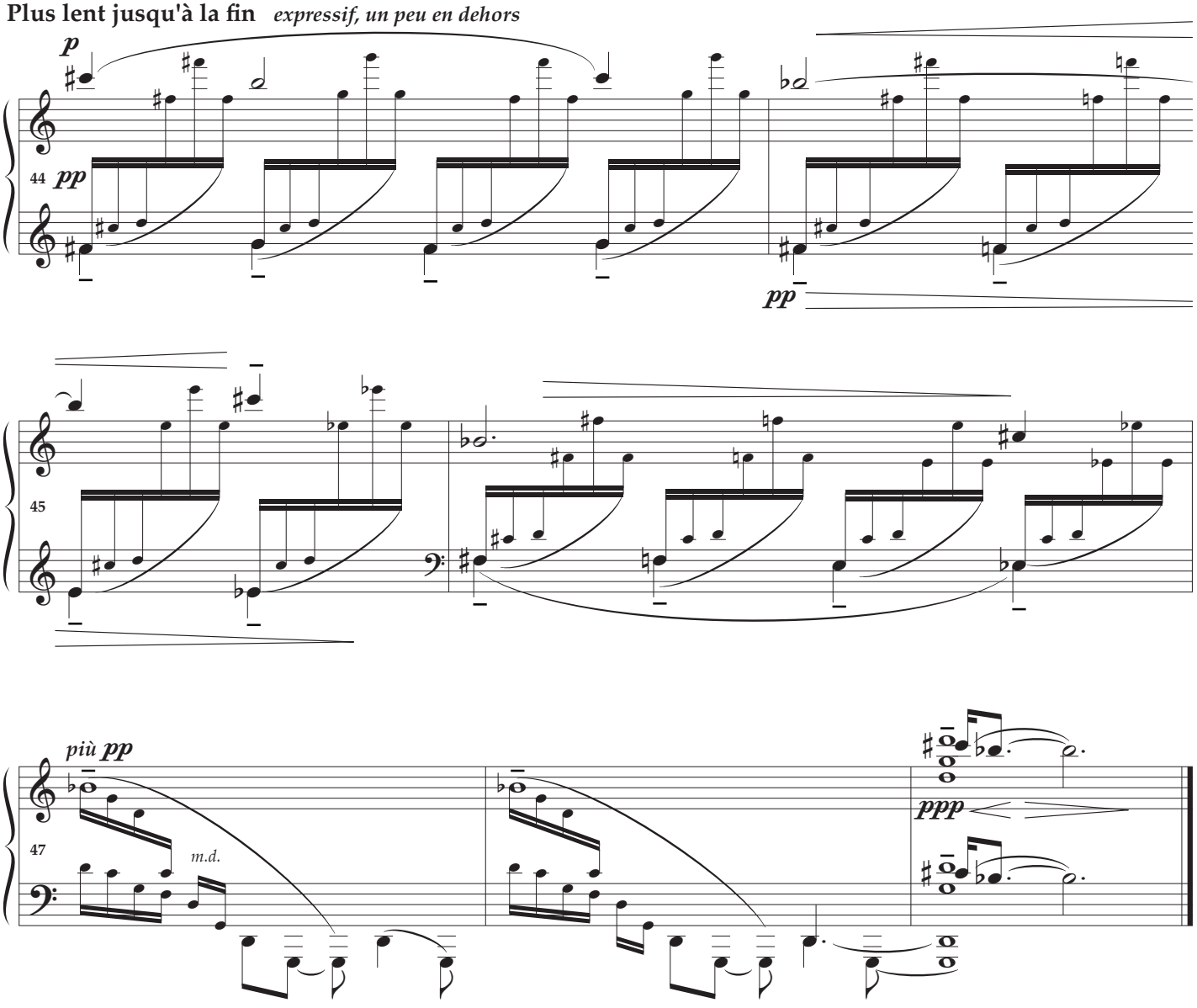

un peu animé et plus clair
8va
12/8
pp
marqué
24
25
p
27
28


29
p
p
31
*
f
8va
pp
ff
5
32
f
p
33
8va
pp
p
marqué
pp
34
8va
p
marqué


loco
pp
35
p
expressif
en dehors
*
36
5
pp
37
più p
38
retenu
p
Tempo I
39
p
4
pp



Plus lent jusqu'à la fin *expressif, un peu en dehors*



Appendix

Comments, afterthoughts & vocabulary

Duration: 4’50

In spite of my having suggested some fingering, here is an extract from Debussy’s own introduction to his etudes: “Absence of fingering is an excellent exercise, negating musicians’ perverse desire to completely dismiss the composer’s (and editor’s), and thereby vindicating words of eternal wisdom: ‘If you want something done well, do it yourself’”. Let us seek our own fingering!

The trick is to feel the piece in slow crotchet beats, but it must not drag. Keep an even slower tempo in reserve for the final bars. Debussy uses a variety of markings for pressure and accentuation, but avoids *sforzato* in this piece.

- The bracketed metronome speed appears in the original Durand edition
- The sostenuto pedal suggestions on page two are editorial
- On page 6 the four pedal suggestions are necessary to maintain the tenor melodic line
- **30 & 31** presented in B flat

doucement sonore	gently sonorous
un peu en dehors	a little in relief
presque rien	almost silent
très égal — comme une buée irisée	very even — like an iridescent mist
doucement appuyé	gentle pressure
cedez	yield
un peu animé et plus clair	a little animated and more bright in tone
marqué	marked
très effilé	arpeggiate delicately
plus lent jusqu’à la fin	slower tempo until the end

II *Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut*

(And the moon sets upon the temple that was)

à Louis Laloy

According to the dedicatee, a cultivated sinologist, this most original composition was inspired by Chinese poetry and the Orient evoking East Asia in particular. The *image* is much inspired by the gamelan* and features a recurring ornamented pentatonic melody, leaving an impression of profound stillness and serenity. A contemplative essay on the monastic and mystical East.

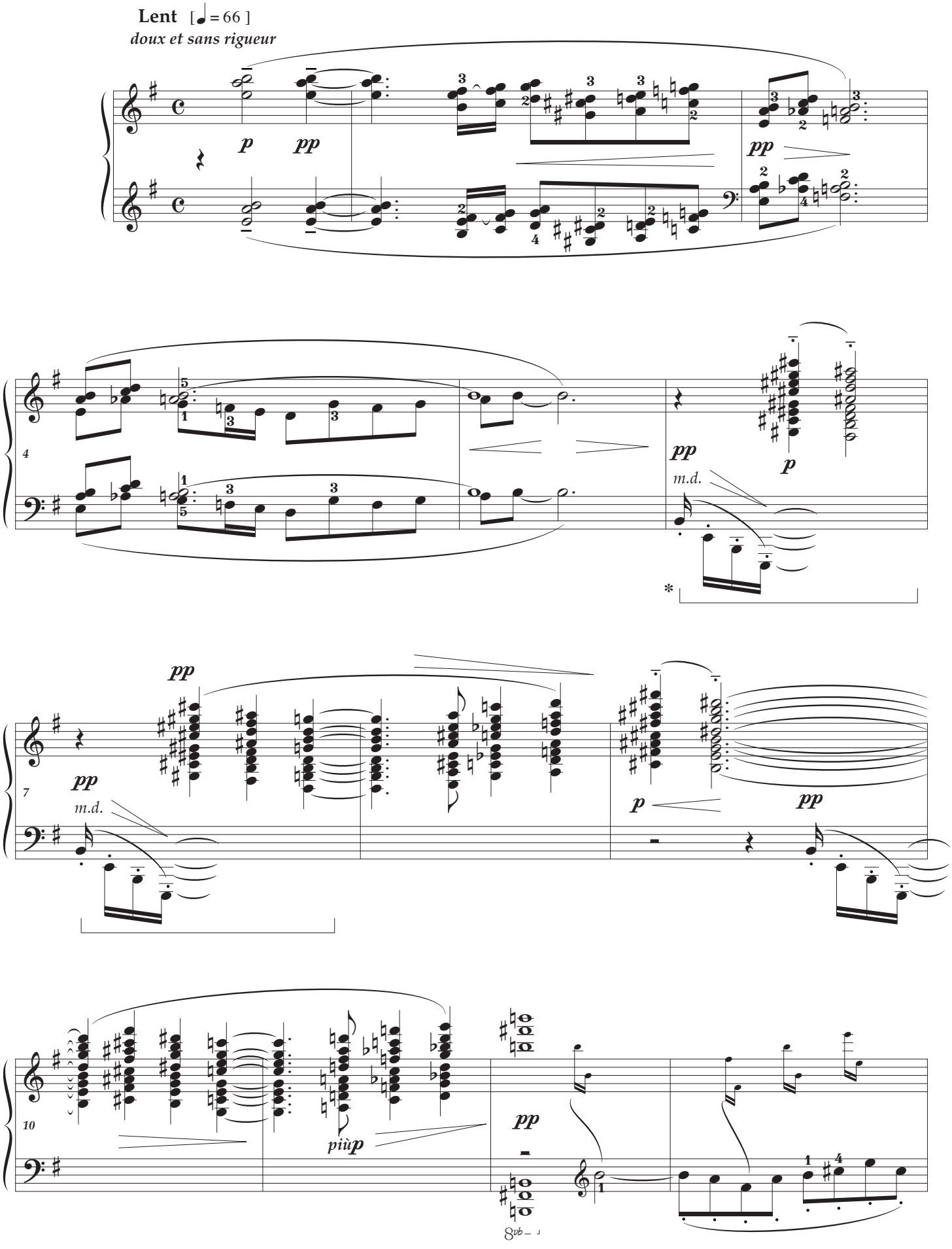
Much of the chordal writing is derived from early western traditional music but Debussy uses these harmonies as unique sounds in themselves. Like the ruined temple, the language has survived, but in a new world and with a new purpose. It is possible to see how this piece must have influenced Bartók's *the Night's Music.*

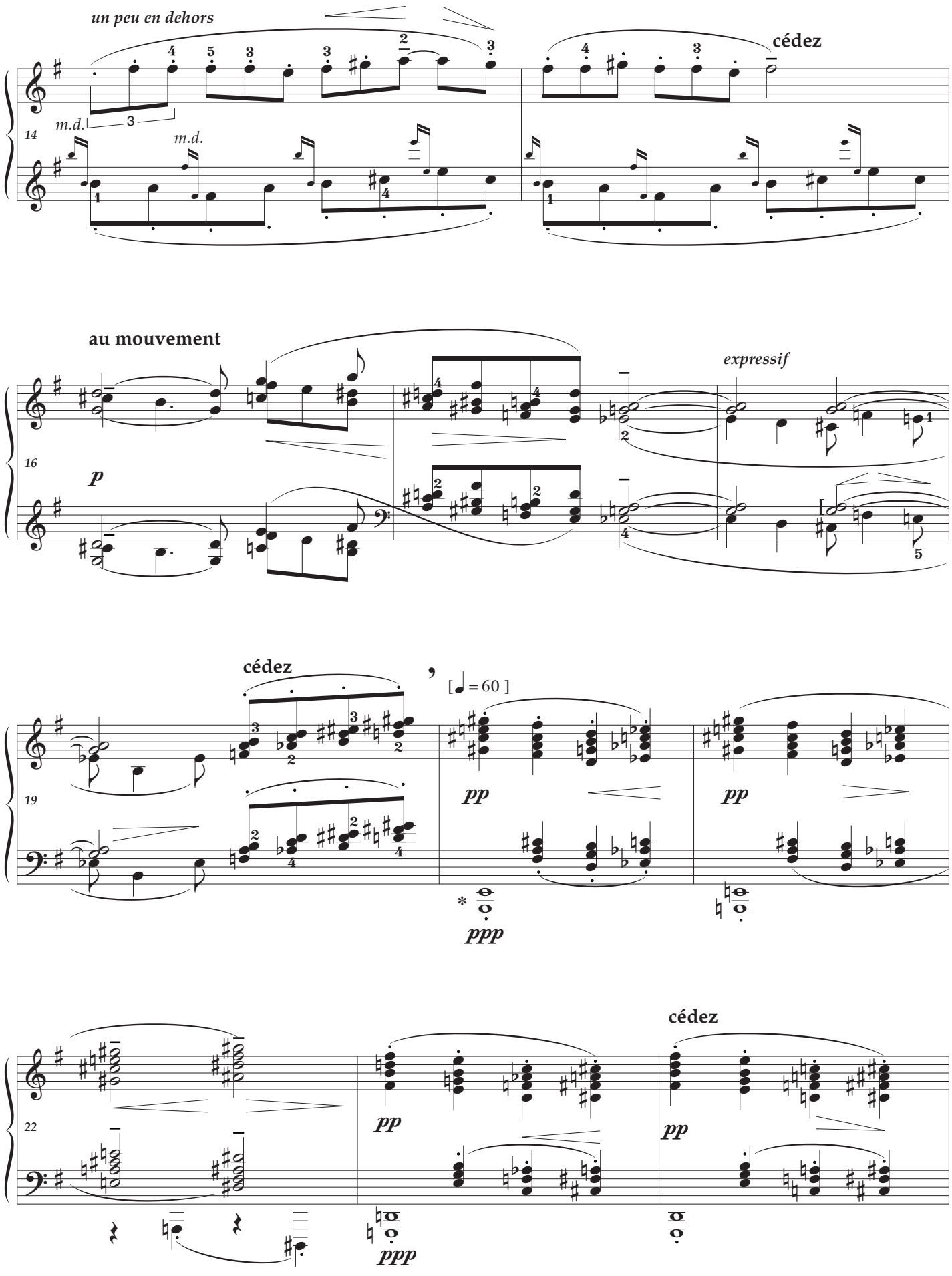
Debussy remarked that the school of the Javanese musician « consists of the eternal rhythm of the sea, the wind in the leaves, and a thousand other tiny noises, which they listen to with great care…»

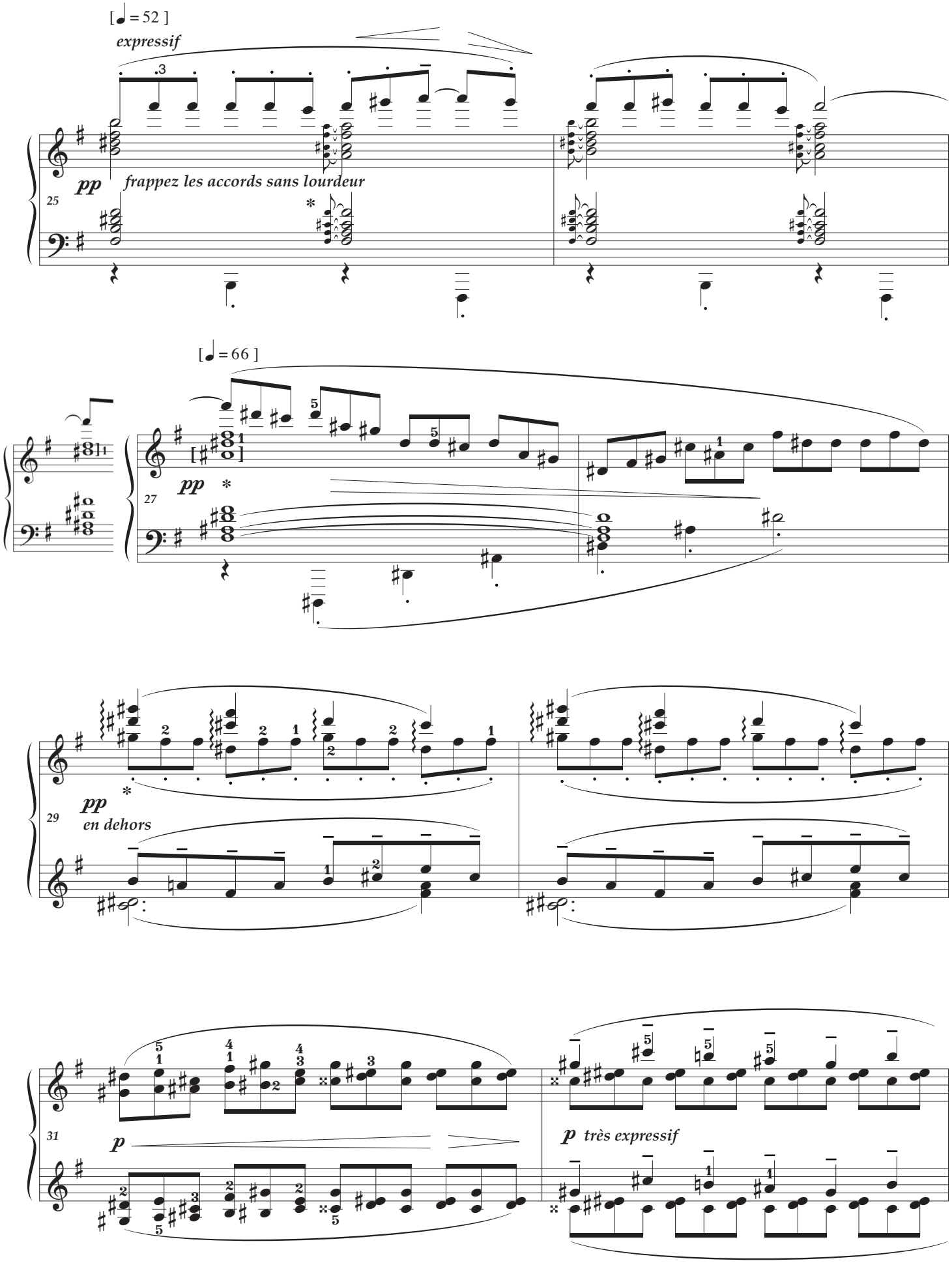
« Do you remember the Javanese music, able to express every shade of meaning, even unmentionable shades . . . which make our tonic and dominant seem like ghosts, for use by naughty little children? »

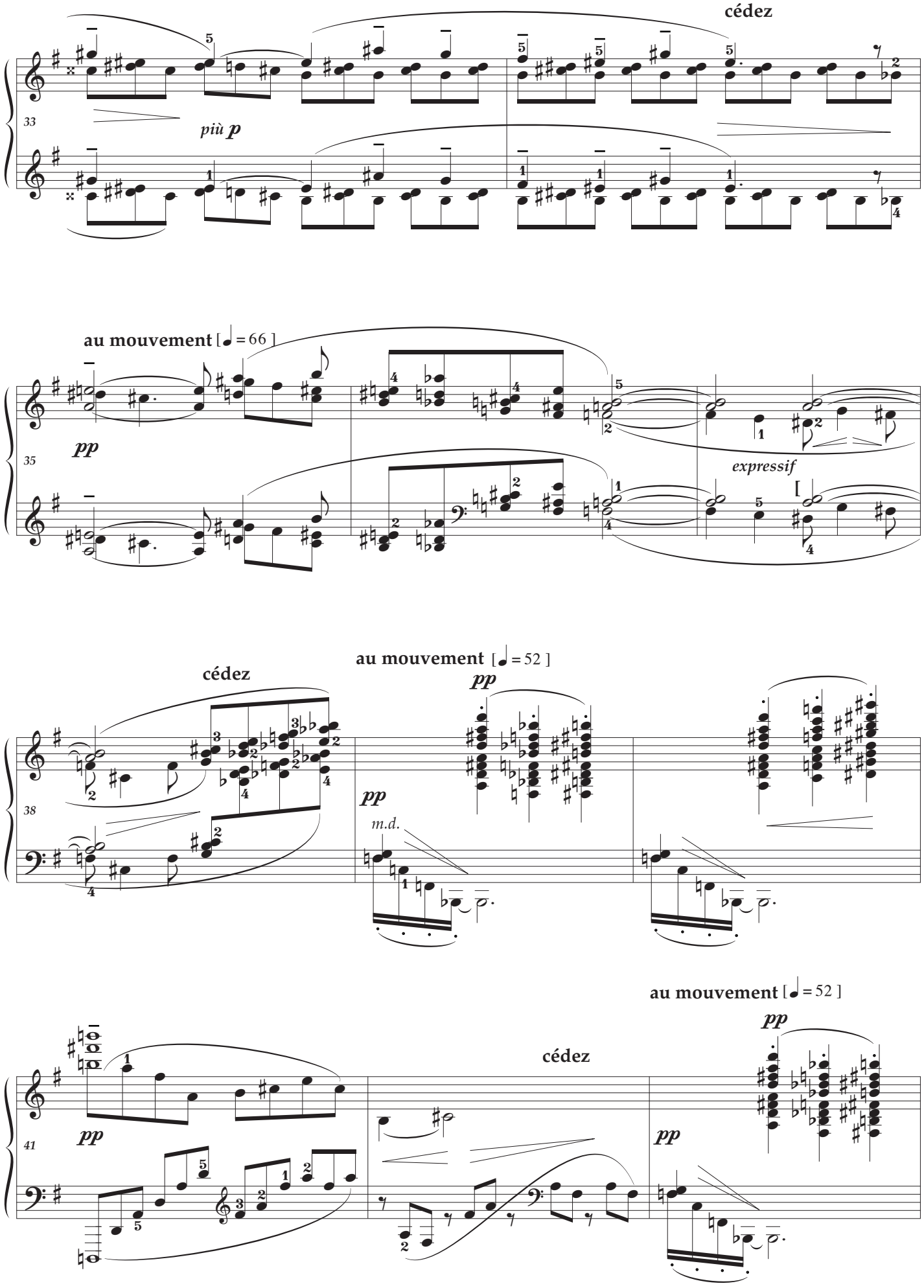
* *the traditional percussion ensemble of Java and Bali in Indonesia*

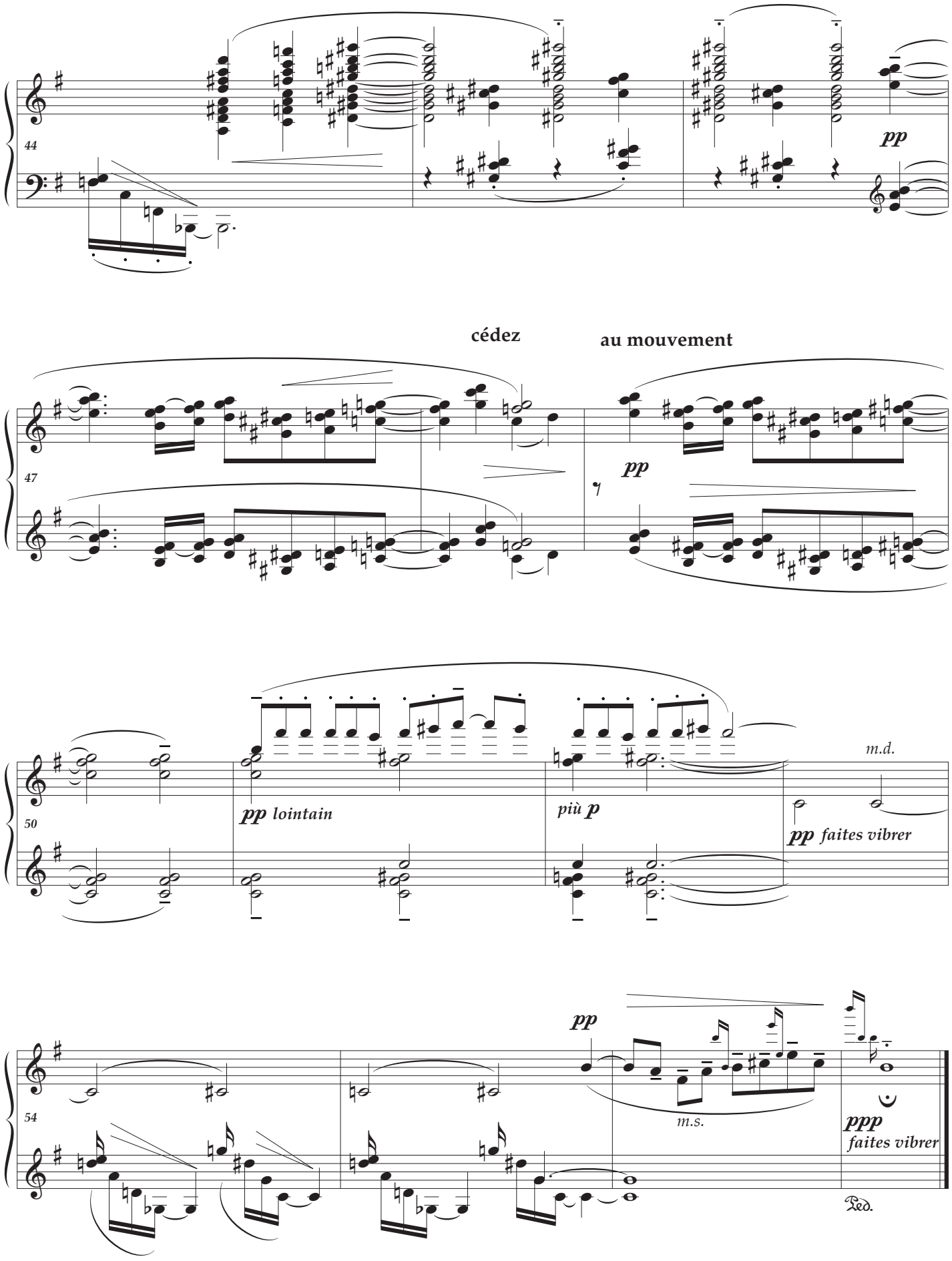
Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut




un peu en dehors
cédez
14
m.d.
m.d.
au mouvement
expressif
16
p
cédez
[= 60]
19
pp
pp
ppp
cédez
22
pp
pp
ppp


[♩ = 52]
expressif
pp
frappez les accords sans lourdeur
25
[♩ = 66]
pp
27
pp
en dehors
29
p
31
p très expressif


cédez
33
più p
au mouvement [♩ = 66]
pp
35
expressif
cédez
au mouvement [♩ = 52]
pp
38
pp
m.d.
au mouvement [♩ = 52]
pp
cédez
41
pp
pp


44
pp
47
cédez
au mouvement
pp
50
pp lointain
più p
m.d.
pp faites vibrer
54
pp
m.s.
ppp
faites vibrer
Ped.

Appendix

Comments, afterthoughts & vocabulary

Duration : 5’40

- All the bracketed metronome speeds appear in the original Durand edition
- **6 & 7** the pedal suggestions are editorial
- **20** it is not often that we see staccato semibreves !
- **25/26** tied acciaccatura chords have been added to make the composer’s intentions clear
- **27** ossia: LH — by omitting F♯, the treble tie may be held
- **29** the alto should be played on the beat

doux et sans rigueur	gentle and with rhythmic freedom
un peu en dehors	a little in relief
cédez	yield
frapper les accords sans lourdeur	strike the chords without weight
lointain	distant
faites vibrer	pedal until the end

III *Poissons d'Or*

(Golden Fish)

à Ricardo Viñes

Thus the first and last of these 6 *images* have watery themes and of the six, *Poissons d'Or*, together with *Reflets dans l'eau*, are probably the most frequently performed. Published in 1905, this gorgeous piece demonstrates Debussy's extraordinary sense of colour in sound, his pianistic imagination unbound by the music of his time.

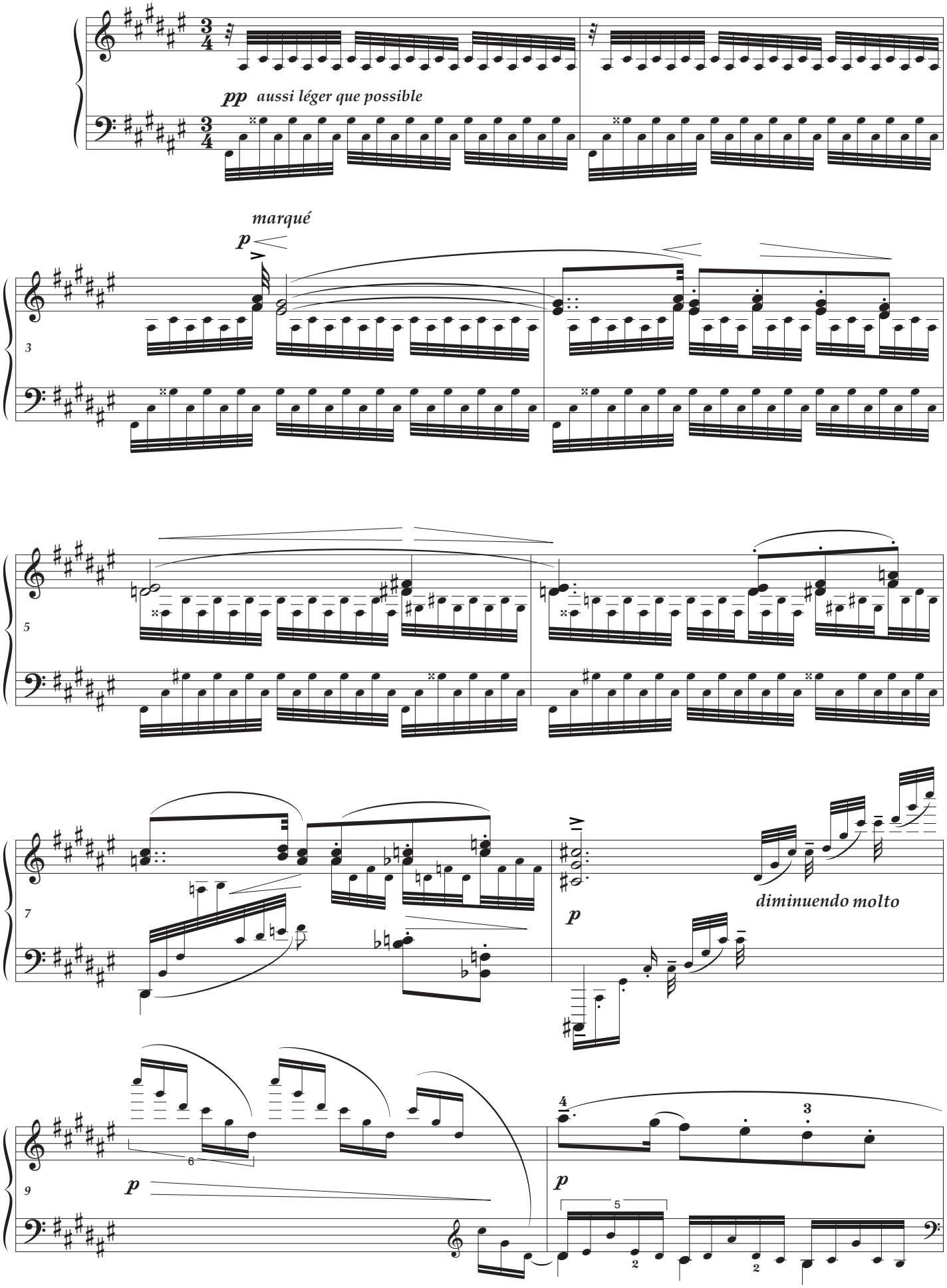
In French, a goldfish is usually translated as *poisson rouge* — a red fish, if you like. Debussy's description of a golden fish is indeed poetic, and you will find some piscine excitement here — some "shimmering" and perhaps a flash of scale, tail and fin — this is inspired music, full of delicate melodies and inventive harmonies, grace and elegance. The poetry is more in the music, perhaps not quite so much in the water as *reflets dans l'eau*.

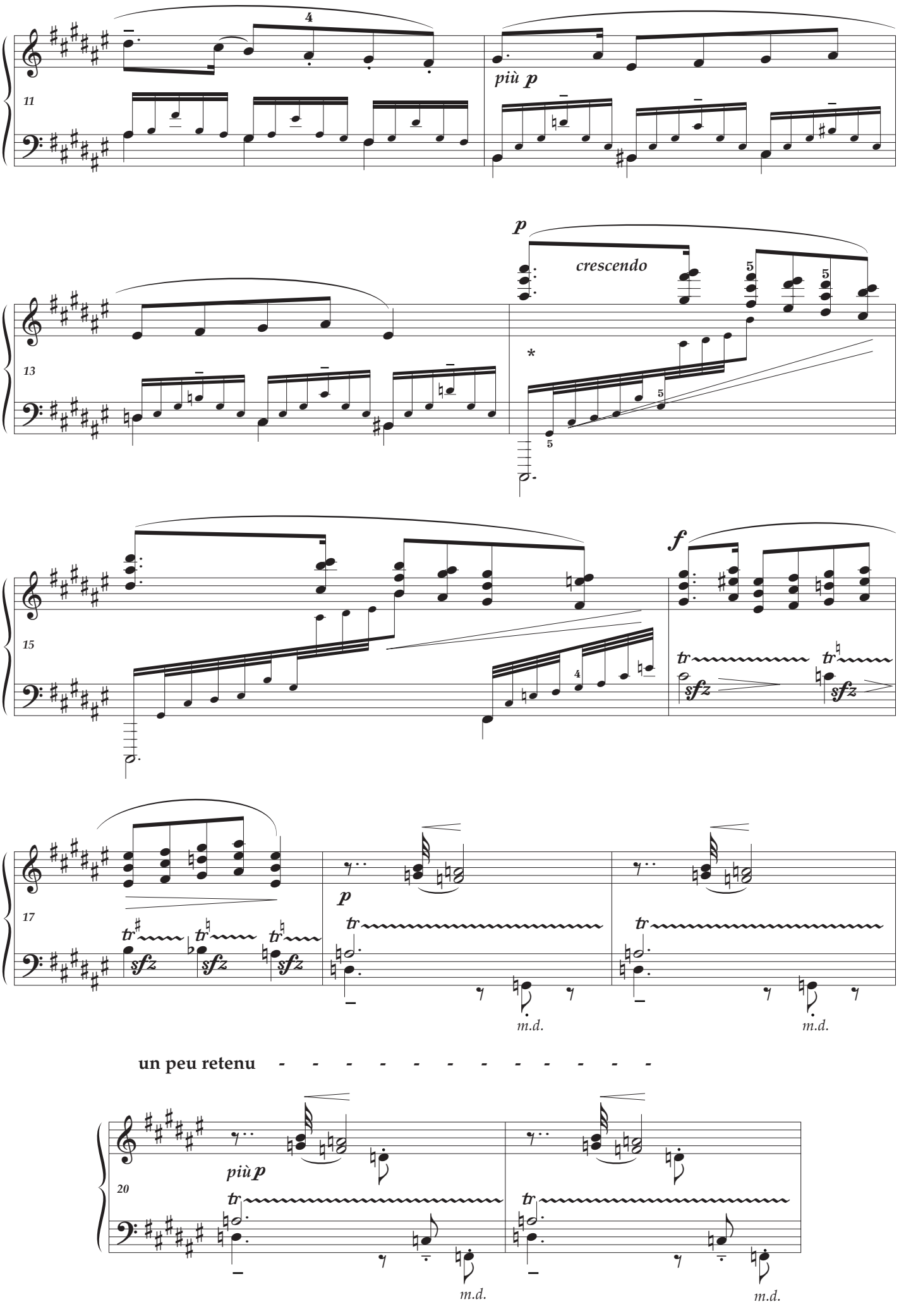
Apparently its inspiration was a small Japanese lacquer panel owned by Debussy and depicting two gold-coloured fish. It is also quite possible that the piece was inspired by a Minkus 1866 ballet (revived by the Bolshoi in Moscow 1903) — *Le Poisson Doré*.

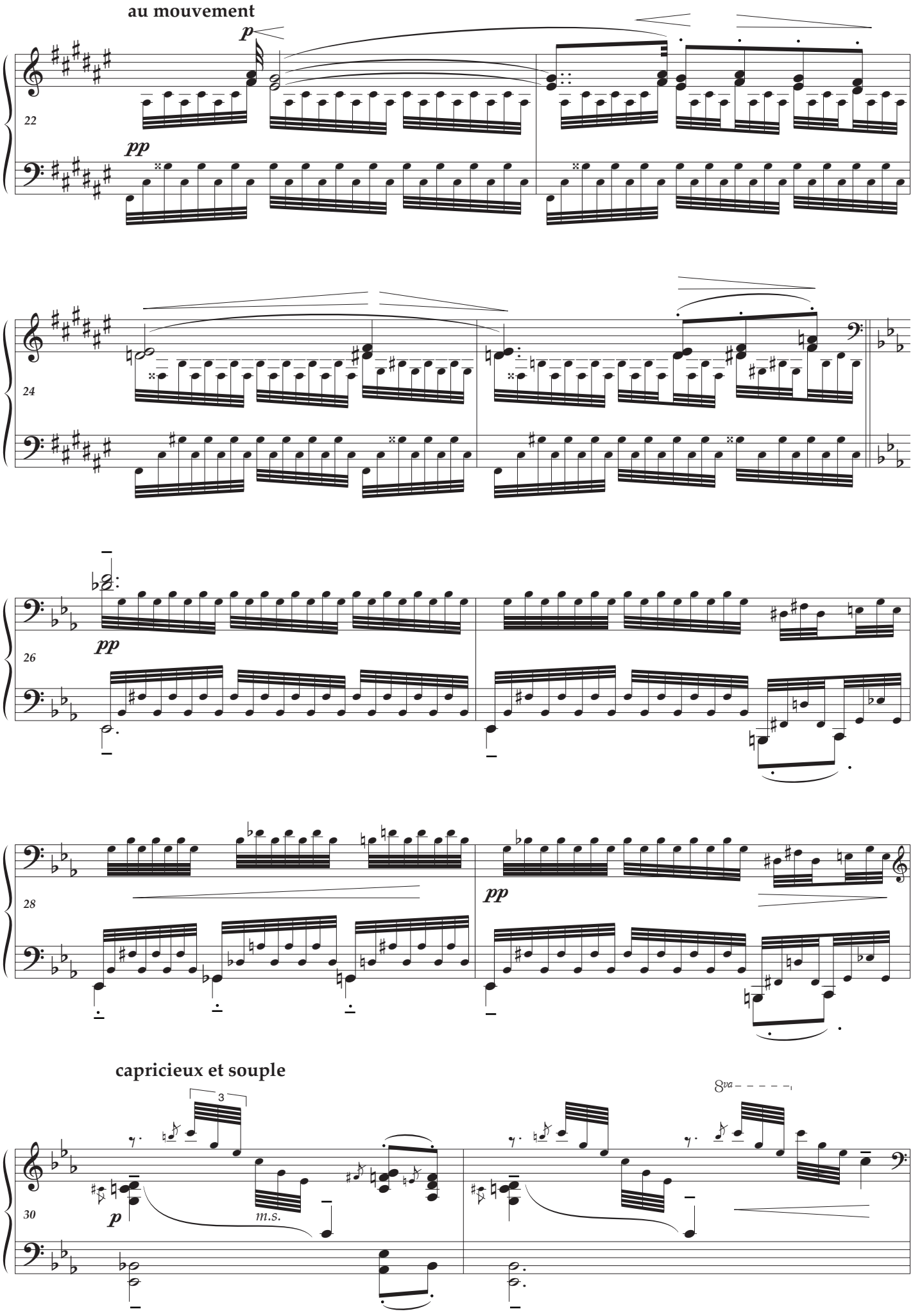
POISSONS D'OR

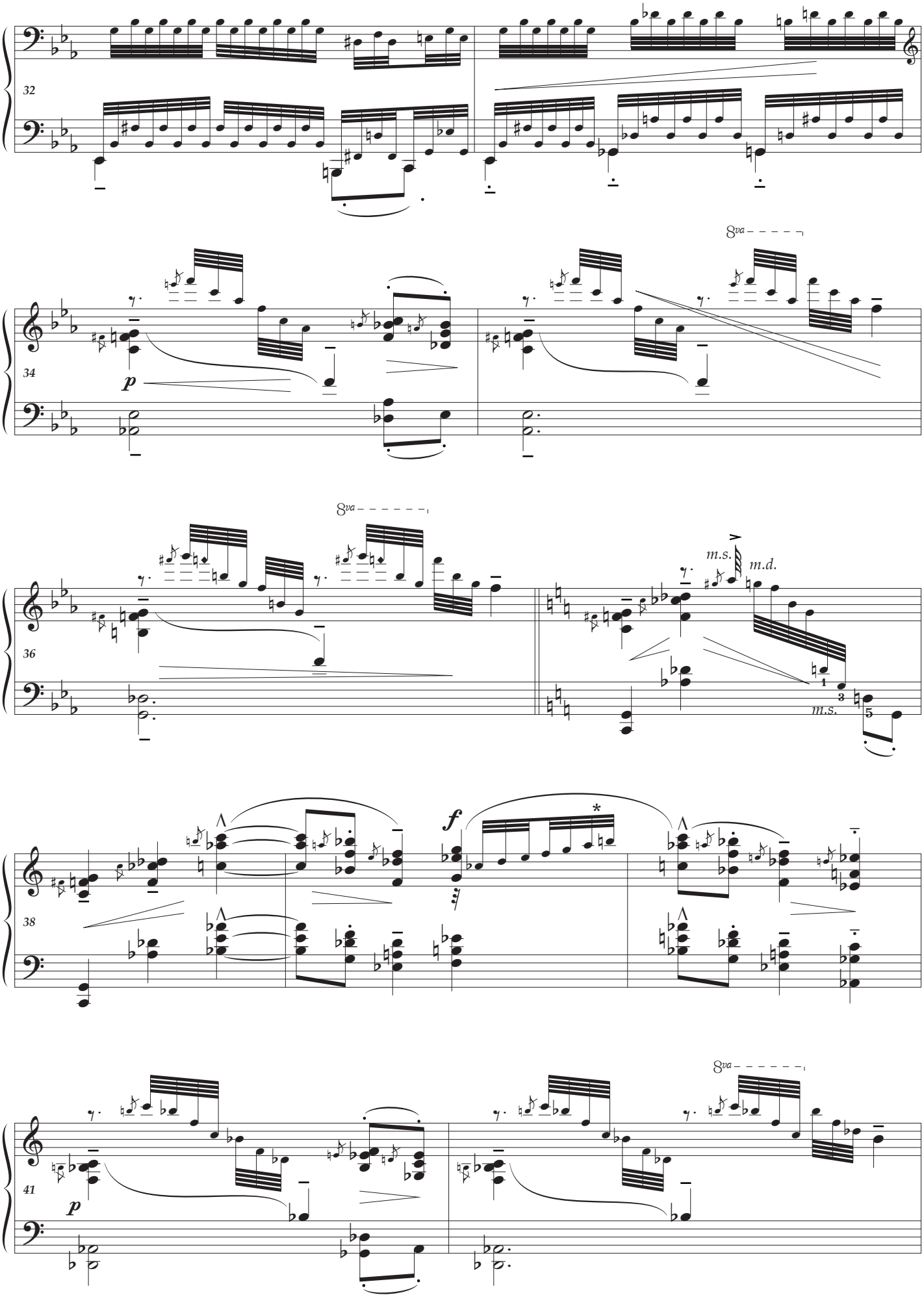
Animé

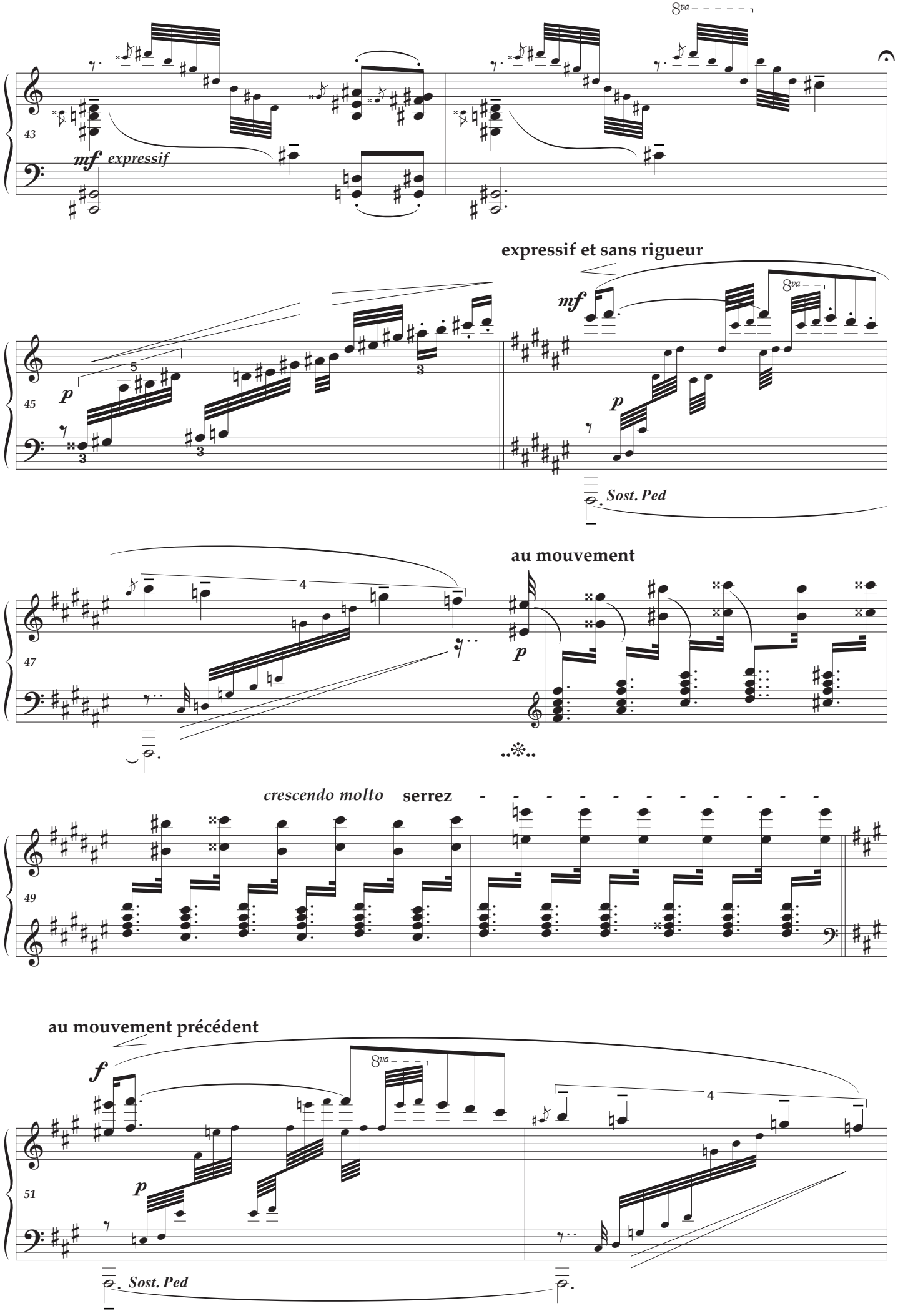
[♩= 112]

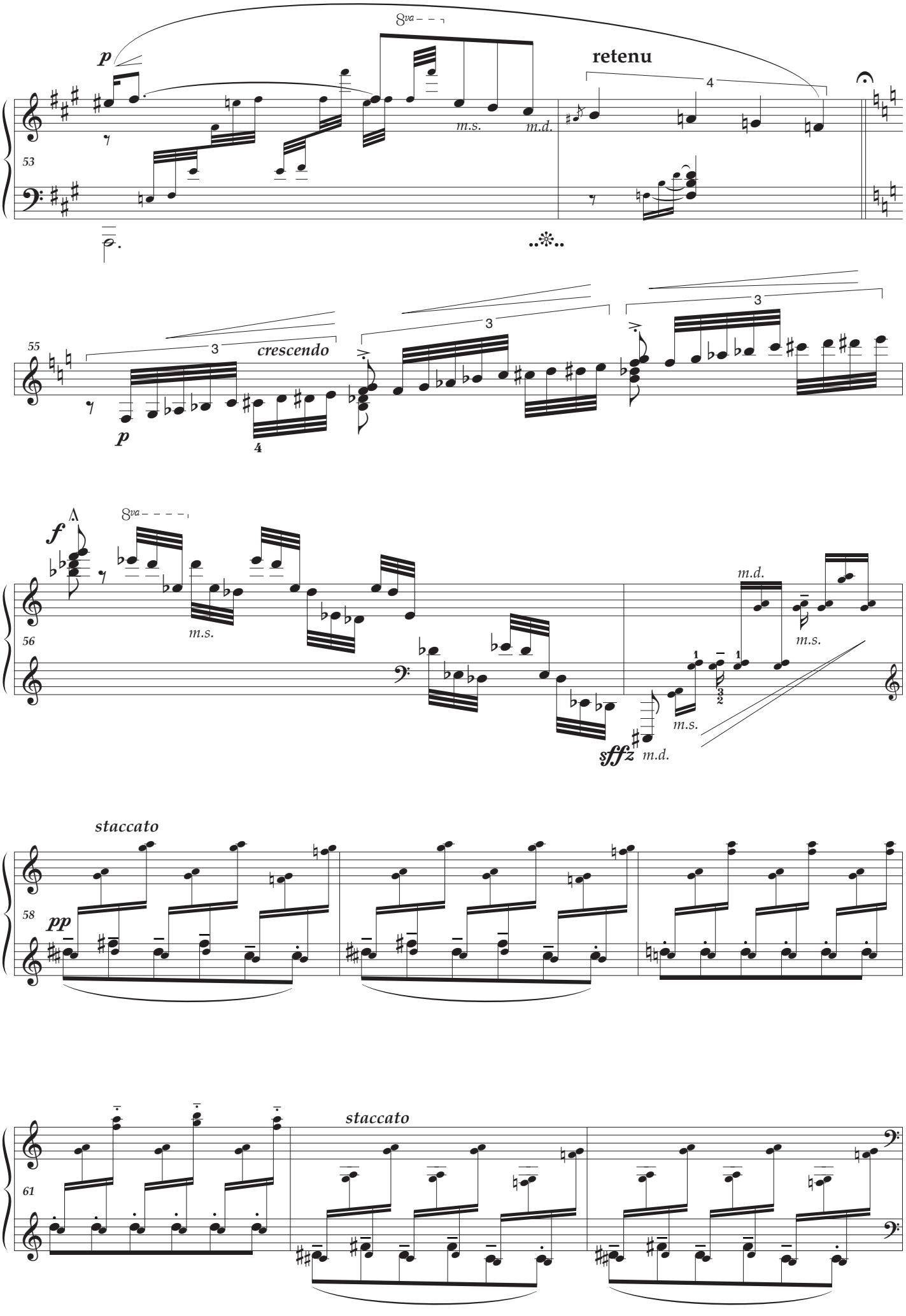


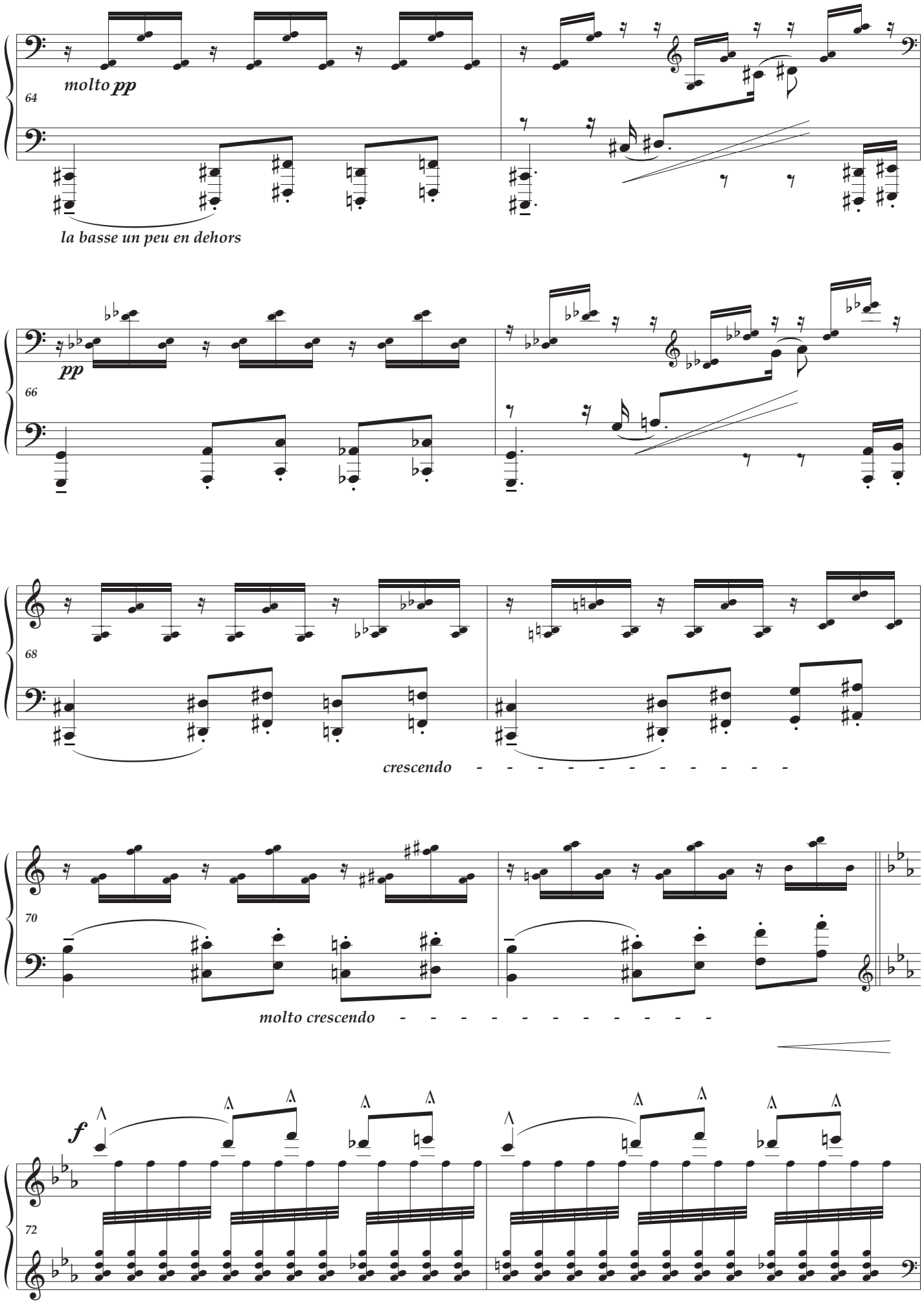

11
più p
13
p
crescendo
15
f
sfz
17
p
m.d.
un peu retenu
20
più p
m.d.

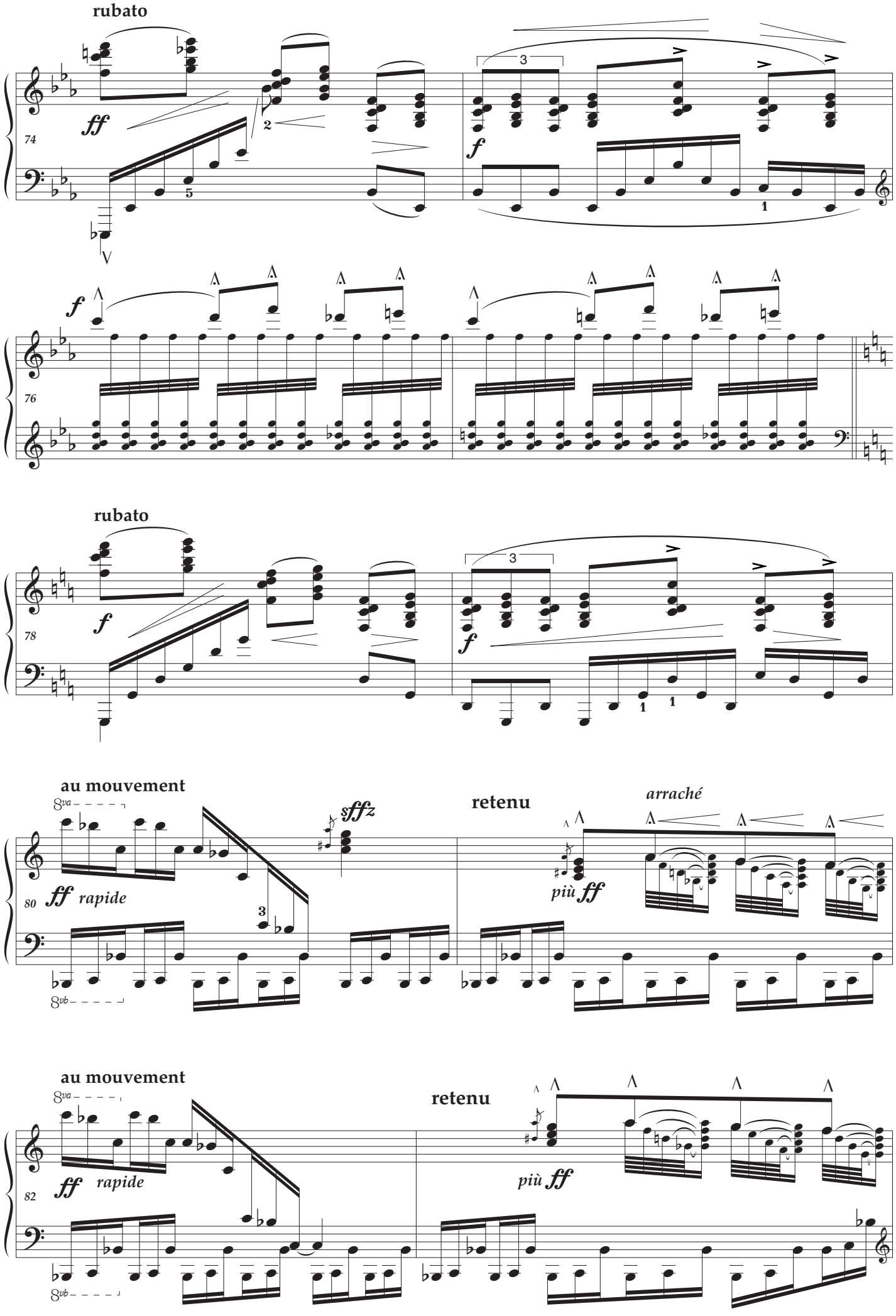

au mouvement
p
22
pp
24
26
pp
28
pp
capricieux et souple
3
30
p
m.s.
8va

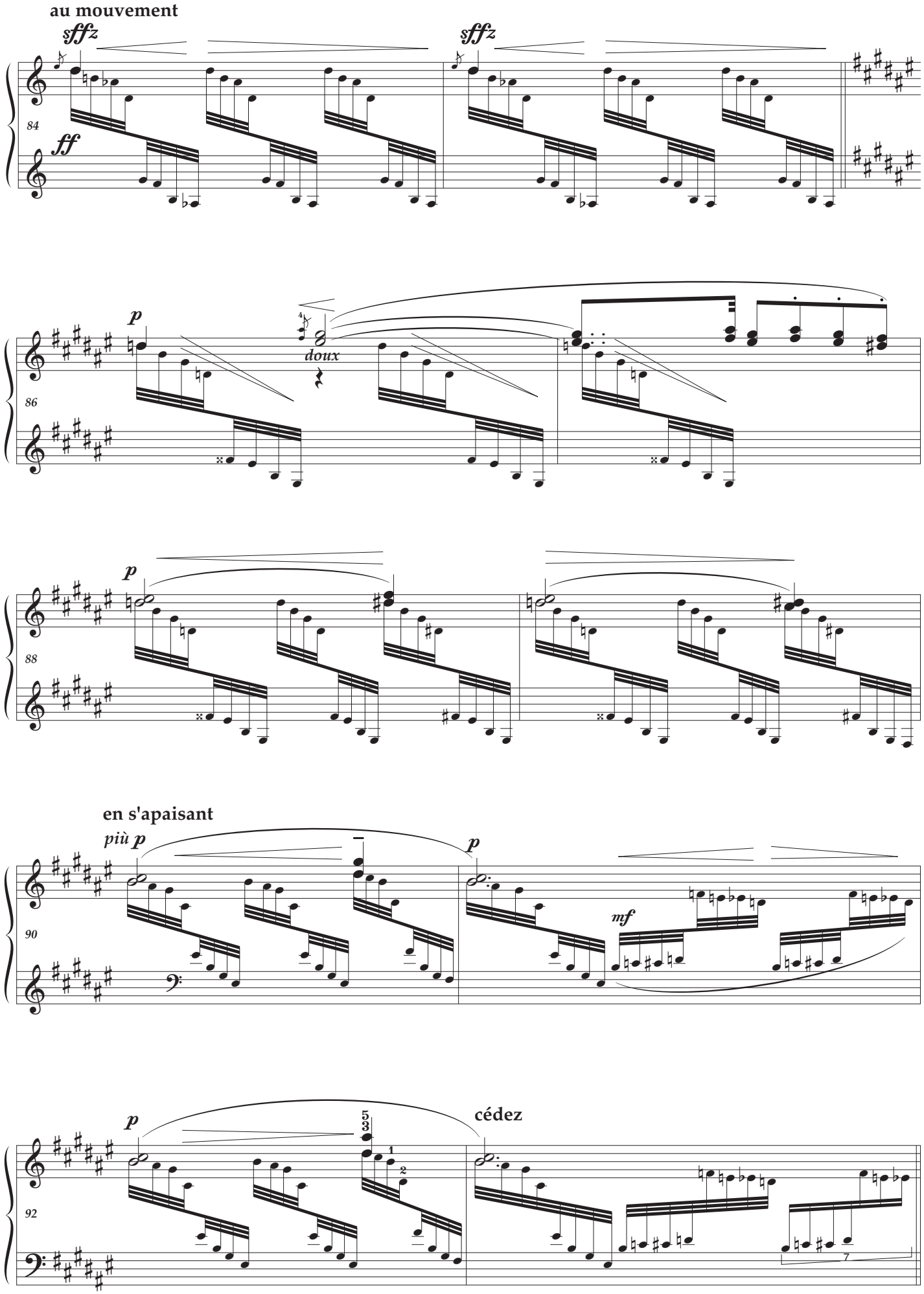

32
34
8va
p
36
8va
m.s.
m.d.
m.s.
38
f
*
41
p
8va


43
mf expressif
8va
45
expressif et sans rigueur
mf
p
Sost. Ped
47
au mouvement
p
49
crescendo molto
serrez
51
au mouvement précédent
f
p
Sost. Ped


p
8va
m.s.
m.d.
retenu
4
53
55
3
crescendo
p
4
f
56
m.s.
m.d.
sffz
staccato
pp
58
61


molto pp
64
la basse un peu en dehors
pp
66
68
crescendo
70
molto crescendo
f
72


rubato
ff
74
f
76
rubato
f
78
f
au mouvement
8va
ff rapide
sffz
80
3
8vb
retenu
arraché
più ff
au mouvement
8va
ff rapide
82
8vb
retenu
più ff


au mouvement
sffz
sffz
84
ff
p
doux
86
p
88
en s'apaisant
più p
p
mf
90
p
cédez
92

commencer au-dessous du mouvement

94

pp scherzando *

5

au mouvement et en serrant jusqu'à la fin

crescendo

più crescendo

f

diminuendo

p

Modéré

95

pp

8va

retenu

96

più pp

ppp

Appendix

Comments, afterthoughts & vocabulary

Duration: 4'50

- The bracketed (very fast) metronome speed appears in the original Durand edition
- The sostenuto pedal suggestions are editorial
- **14/15** the LH accompaniment has been slightly 'rearranged'
- **39** I believe that the 3rd beat A flat and B flat may be an error, corrected here to naturals
- **94** This *scherzando* passage sounds rather fine if played with some clarity with minimum pedal

aussi léger que possible	as light as possible
marqué	marked
capricieux et souple	capricious and not in strict time
sans rigueur	rhythmically free
serrez	accelerate
la basse un peu en dehors	the bass slightly in relief
arraché	wrenched
en s'apaisant	becoming calm
doux	*dolce*
cédez	yield
commencez au dessous du mouvement	begin with a slower tempo
en serrant jusqu'à la fin	accelerating until the end